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Security arrangements at the United Nations Office at Geneva

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to paragraph 174 of General Assembly resolution 54/249 of 23 December 1999, in which the Secretary-General is requested to review the current security arrangements at the United Nations Office at Geneva and to report thereon to the Assembly at the main part of its fifty-fifth session. The report presents not only the current situation, including a number of measures put in place to improve security at the United Nations Office at Geneva, but also outlines the contents, conclusions and implications of a security concept for the Office, which has been developed in the course of 1999 by a task force consisting of representatives of the Swiss Federal and Cantonal authorities and of the United Nations Office at Geneva. The understanding has been reached between the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Swiss authorities that the additional costs involved in the implementation of the security concept have to be borne by the United Nations and the host country, with the United Nations assuming the costs relating to the upgrading of the security infrastructure inside the United Nations compound. It is the intention of the Secretary-General to address these additional requirements in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003.

* The footnote requested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

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I. Introduction

1. The Palais des Nations was built during the years from 1931 to 1937 as the seat of the League of Nations which, at the time, was located at Palais Wilson. With the creation of the United Nations, it became the seat of the United Nations Office at Geneva. The land on which the Palais was built and the park surrounding it, known as the Parc de l'Ariana or, in official terms, "parcelle 2070", had originally been bequeathed to the City of Geneva by a rich Geneva philanthropist, Gustave Revilliod, with a number of conditions as to the way in which the land could be used, including one related to public access to the park. The current terms of the use of the Parc de l'Ariana are defined in a 1946 agreement between the United Nations and the Swiss Confederation. It contains a clause according to which the public is to be allowed to circulate on the grounds that comprise parcelle 2070, unless public access has to be restricted or prohibited in the interest of tranquillity of work or of security.

2. It should be noted that, over time, both the League of Nations and the United Nations acquired additional grounds adjoining parcelle 2070 (see annex I). This additional land, slightly smaller than parcelle 2070, is not subject to any restrictions as regards its use by the United Nations. A new building E was constructed between 1968 and 1973, to increase conference facilities and to provide for additional office space. The new building includes 4 large conference rooms and 7 mid-sized ones, thus bringing the total to 30 conference rooms, with a capacity of some 9,400 seats.

3. Throughout its existence, the Palais des Nations has been a site with high symbolic value. The Place des Nations, which is situated immediately in front of what used to be the main entrance gate of the Palais compound, has always been a location of choice for all sorts of demonstrations. This situation has consistently brought security issues to the fore when improvements to the physical landscape of the compound were considered.

4. It should be recalled that it is the responsibility of the United Nations to take all necessary measures to ensure security inside the compound grounds and buildings while, under the Headquarters Agreement with the United Nations, it is up to the Swiss Federation and the Canton of Geneva authorities to ensure security outside the United Nations compound. In these circumstances, and in order to optimize security arrangement measures, it has proved increasingly useful to reinforce coordination and cooperation between the security forces of the United Nations and those of the Canton and Swiss Federation.

II. Background information

A. Site

5. The Palais des Nations compound property (see annex I), which is the largest in the United Nations system, measures 46.6 hectares and has a perimeter of 3.5 kilometres. The main building (including building E) is a large, horizontally laid-out structure with a footprint of 3.6 hectares. It is almost 600 metres long, with 40 entrance doors, 17 of which are used on an ongoing basis for staff, delegates, visitors or deliveries. It comprises some 2,100 offices that accommodate approximately 2,500 staff. The compound contains some 2,200 parking spaces, 400 of which are underground, below building E. Some 6 kilometres of internal roads allow for vehicular traffic through the site. More than 5,000 vehicles enter and leave the compound daily.

6. Five smaller buildings (Villa le Bocage and Bocage Annex, Villa la Pelouse and its dépendance, and Villa la Fenêtre) are located within the compound. They accommodate 160 staff within 98 offices. Villa le Bocage currently houses staff training activities. Villa La Fenêtre serves as the residence of the Director-General. There is also a small building situated outside the compound itself, Villa Les Feuillantines, which is principally used as the centre for the issuance of identification passes and badges.

7. The compound itself has three entrance gates. The main gate is at route de Pregny, a secondary entrance gate is at the chemin de Fer and a third, at Place des Nations, is currently closed to vehicular traffic but open to pedestrians. The Bocage annex has its own vehicular and pedestrian entrance and exit; however, cars entering there cannot access other locations in the United Nations compound. Finally, there is a gate at chemin de l'Impératrice, which is normally closed but can be used in case of emergencies or for special events or meetings. It was in fact used as an alternative entrance and exit during the recent twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

8. There are five secondary sites outside the main compound (see annex II), for which United Nations Office at Geneva provides security, namely:

(a) The rue de Montbrillant and rue de Vermont sites (occupied by divisions of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), with some 900 staff;

(b) The Palais Wilson, which accommodates some 270 staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and of the secretariat for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction;

(c) The premises occupied by the United Nations Children's Fund at avenue de la Paix, with some 160 staff;

(d) The International Environment House (formerly known as the Geneva Executive Centre), with some 300 staff of the European office of the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and several liaison offices of other United Nations entities;

(e) The International Trade Centre (ITC), with some 230 staff.

B. Activities and special events

9. The United Nations Office at Geneva houses the largest number of conference activities in the United Nations system, many of which require special security arrangements. The main recurring conferences are the annual sessions of the Commission on Human Rights and its subsidiary bodies, the annual assemblies of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the Conference on Disarmament and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (the latter every two years).

10. A number of special events take place throughout the year, including: visits by heads of State (some 15 in 1999) and other dignitaries; events such as the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in 1998; concerts such as the Net Aid event in September 1999; and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, in June 2000.

11. A number of other activities attract visitors to the Palais des Nations and present additional challenges in terms of security. Among them are:

(a) The Library at the United Nations Office at Geneva, which is one of the largest in Europe. It attracts a large clientele of readers, researchers and students. At present, 1,500 library badges for visitors are in circulation. Users of the Library average 50 per day;

(b) A store located on the compound (SAFI), which caters to delegates, staff and retirees of the Office and of other organizations of the United Nations family situated at Geneva (ILO, WHO etc.). It is estimated that SAFI is visited annually by 30,000 customers;

(c) Guided tours of the Palais des Nations, which were provided to some 120,000 visitors in 1998 and some 92,000 in 1999. Visitors are checked through metal detectors at the route de Pregny gate and directed to the visitors entrance, situated in the new building. There are also some 10,000 to 12,000 yearly visitors, friends of staff members who are checked at the same gate;

(d) The 11 press agencies with office space and 250 permanently accredited journalists with work facilities on the premises;

(e) Art exhibits, which are held throughout the year. Several run concurrently in different areas of the Palais.

Retirees have special badges for use at the United Nations Office at Geneva, similar to those in use at Headquarters. Badges of staff or retirees of other organizations are recognized by security staff as allowing entrance to the premises.

12. Finally, although not directly related to security at the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Office has been entrusted with the responsibility of providing security to a number of conferences held outside Geneva, such as:

(a) Fifth and Sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held at Bonn and The Hague, respectively;

(b) Third and Fourth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, held at Recife, Brazil, and Bonn, respectively;

(c) Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal;

(d) Tenth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, held at Bangkok;

(e) World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in South Africa in 2001.

13. Each of the above-mentioned occasions involves, depending on the size of the meeting and assessed security risks, up to 15 security personnel from the United Nations Office at Geneva, in addition to local reinforcements. Since 1996, the workload associated with these conferences has risen from an occasional effort related to a sporadic event, to an annual programme of several conferences, to the present situation, which is equivalent in terms of staff to more than 600 staff-days per year. The servicing of such conferences is provided by the Office on a reimbursable basis.

C. Staffing

14. The Safety and Security Section is part of Office of General Services, Division of Administration. In view of the importance of security issues, the Chief of Section not only reports to the Director, Division of Administration, through the Chief of General Services but has also a direct reporting line to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

15. As can be seen from annex III, in addition to the offices of the Chief and Deputy Chief, the Section is composed of four branches:

(a) The Surveillance Platoon deals with investigations, conferences and special events, protection of very important persons, all annexes (i.e., buildings outside the compound) and constitutes a reserve group in case of fire and other emergencies;

(b) The Guard Platoon deals with entrance and gate control, traffic within the compound, and shift teams (morning, evening, night and weekends, holidays);

(c) The Development and Support Unit deals with electronic data processing, training, identification and garage administration, support and the Control and Operations Centre;

(d) The specialized Fire and Safety Unit deals with fire safety and emergency evacuation, first aid intervention, mail screening and specialized searches.

16. Total staffing (see annex IV) is equivalent to 106 positions, of which 71 are posts established under the regular budget and 19 are temporary posts financed under extrabudgetary funds (i.e., funded by the extrabudgetary entities to which the Office provides security, such as UNHCR, ITC, the United Nations Compensation Commission, all entities located at International Environment House etc.), and 192 staff-months per annum (equivalent to 16 full-time positions), which are financed through temporary assistance funds. This number is augmented by temporary assistance when new meetings or special events are being held (e.g., ILO and WHO conferences), with related costs financed directly by the entities concerned. In addition, as indicated in paragraph 12 above, the United Nations Office at Geneva is providing security for a number of meetings held outside Geneva on a reimbursable basis.

17. There is an ongoing exchange of information, coordination and cooperation with security services at United Nations Headquarters and, consequently, the standards, procedures and arrangements at the United Nations Office at Geneva are consonant with those in effect in New York.

18. An important element in ensuring the adequacy of the provision of security services is the training of staff, and special care has been taken in that regard. Total training hours in all aspects of security have steadily increased from some 2,700 in 1994, to 4,000 in 1998 and 4,200 in 1999 for essentially the same number of staff.

19. Early in 1998, the Identification Office was moved to the Villa les Feuillantines, outside the main compound, opposite the Place des Nations gate. It was fully computerized and is now able to issue badges not only for staff and retirees but also for conference delegates, representatives of non-governmental organizations, journalists and visitors to the Library. This service was previously provided through the substantive offices concerned. As a result, there is a much better possibility of overall control of badge issuance, and the annual number of badges produced directly by Security rose from some 9,000 in 1997 to some 40,000 in 1999. It should be noted that, after consultation with Security Services in New York, the

United Nations Office at Geneva is now producing badges that are virtually identical to those issued at United Nations Headquarters.

III. Security assessment

A. Site vulnerability

20. The surroundings of the Palais des Nations compound are fenced. While regular patrolling takes place throughout the compound and buildings, the focus of control and protection is on the entrance gates and main access doors to the building which are staffed with security personnel who check all those entering, whether by foot or vehicle. The very size of the complex makes it very difficult to provide an even level of control and protection throughout the compound and buildings on an ongoing basis, unless there were to be a very sizeable increase in staffing.

21. Although it has not happened as yet, there is an inherent risk that a well-organized group could penetrate the compound by going through or over the existing fencing. There is also a risk that a large group of demonstrators could penetrate the compound through an entrance gate if the security staff at the gate and the Geneva police force, which ensures protection in the immediate vicinity outside the compound, are not in a position to react in a timely manner to such an action. This may result in:

(a) Activities inside the Palais, including official visits, being disturbed or paralysed;

(b) Destruction of vital equipment or areas within the premises;

(c) Hostage taking of high-ranking officials, delegates or staff;

(d) Terrorist attacks;

(e) Letter bombs or explosive devices being planted.

22. The other buildings for which the Office provides security services are also potential targets for militant action although to a lesser degree. The Palais Wilson has therefore been equipped, at the expense of the Swiss authorities, with a heavy-duty fence along the entrance side of the site, as well as a special entrance pavilion that allows the effective screening of visitors. The Montbrillant site, which was briefly occupied by one militant group in 1999 at the same time as the Palais des Nations, has also been the subject of special measures to protect the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

B. Significant security risk factors and threats

23. The importance of the Palais des Nations as a symbol may be even more relevant within the context of security than one would infer from the activities carried out at the site. As the main European site of the United Nations, it draws militant groups from throughout the continent and beyond, some of which have proved prepared to violate the integrity of the site, and who are capable of doing so. This is even more relevant since conflicts or serious political problems on the world scene very often trigger demonstrations at Place des Nations, which in turn have a direct bearing on the security situation at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

24. Each year, over 100 demonstrations are held at Place des Nations, in front of the entrance gate to the Palais compound. While more than one half of these bring together fewer than 300 demonstrators, a few have mobilized up to 6,000 people. On occasions, these gatherings have constituted a threat for the Palais as militant, and sometimes violent, groups of demonstrators seek to force their way into the Palais grounds. As indicated above, not all demonstrations are necessarily related to the United Nations Office at Geneva or to issues directly involving the United Nations. It seems probable that Place des Nations is chosen in many cases because of its high visibility and exposure to media attention, as well as for reasons of space and convenience.

25. One group in particular, striving to achieve maximum publicity through the temporary occupation of buildings and sites, has targeted the Palais repeatedly over the past decade. In 1997 and 1998, on three occasions, a number of demonstrators were able to penetrate the compound for a few hours, making their way to the courtyard of the Secretariat wing (the Cour du Secrétariat) and briefly to the foyer of door 4. Negotiations took place and they were persuaded to leave without violence. In early 1999, the group carried out a commando-type raid on the Palais at night and occupied a conference room. It took one and a half days of negotiation to persuade them to leave. In the

meantime, a significant portion of the buildings had to be evacuated.

26. While the threat of new actions by the same group remained, the Swiss authorities were, after that incident, confronted with an additional threat related to another conflict situation. As an immediate emergency response, the authorities (who, as indicated above, are responsible for the external protection of the site) decided to call upon the military to defend the outer perimeter of the Palais des Nations. Barbed wire checkpoints were installed at all gates, while all fences were also provisionally reinforced with barbed wire. These emergency measures were in effect for about six months. Nevertheless, it was regrettably clear to everyone that, given the vulnerability of the premises, there was no other alternative at that time.

C. Measures taken

27. The description and examples given above demonstrate the vulnerability of the premises of the Palais des Nations. Considerable efforts have been made to improve the efficiency of the security and to upgrade the level of protection in the most vulnerable areas. Budgetary expenditures amounting to US$ 767,800 in the 1998-1999 biennium and budgetary provisions of US$ 746,000 in the 2000-2001 biennium were or are being utilized to improve overall security at the United Nations Office at Geneva. This included:

(a) Installation of an electronic access control system with turnstiles at entrance gates and doors (those for the latter operating outside working hours) to allow access to staff with magnetic cards;

(b) Installation of a video control system, with over 80 cameras covering the entire premises;

(c) Renovation and reinforcement of the gate at Place des Nations;

(d) Installation of fences and motorized remote-controlled heavy-duty gates to protect the Secretariat wing courtyard;

(e) Installation of motorized, remote-controlled shutters to protect the outside doors of the Secretariat wing and adjoining wings;

(f) Reconstruction of the Allée du Musée as a two-way road, easing vehicular traffic from the route de Pregny gate to all parts of the compound;

(g) Systematic screening of incoming mail for the United Nations Office at Geneva and UNHCR and the training and equipment of staff to deal with small-scale emergency situations or public disturbances.

28. In view of its immediate proximity to Place des Nations and the related security risk involved when demonstrations take place, it was decided to close the gate at the Place to vehicular traffic on a permanent basis. The gate has been replaced as a main entrance by the gate at route de Pregny, which lies several hundred metres away from the Place and is less exposed to potential attacks while major demonstrations are in process. The secondary access gate at chemin de Fer is also situated several hundred metres away from Place des Nations.

29. Further security reinforcement work programmed for the remainder of 2000 and for 2001 includes:

(a) The installation of additional cameras for the video control system;

(b) The installation of additional remote-controlled metal shutters on the ground floor of the old building;

(c) The extension of the electronic access control system;

(d) The reinforcement of further sections of the perimeter fencing and of the entrance gates.

IV. Security concept

30. The penetration of the compound by a well-organized group and its occupation of a conference room underscored the need for close cooperation between the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Swiss authorities. As indicated in paragraph 26 above, the Swiss authorities took specific temporary action to protect the area immediately outside the compound. At the same time, it was considered imperative by all concerned to devise a joint security strategy. Consequently, a task force was created early in 1999, comprising security specialists representing the Swiss Federal and Cantonal authorities and the United Nations Office at Geneva.

31. The task force reviewed the various aspects of security, both inside and outside the compound. It focused on two aspects, namely, prevention and

reaction in case of incident. In presenting its conclusions in October 1999, the task force:

(a) Underscored the need to maintain very close cooperation among all security services (Federal, Cantonal and United Nations Office at Geneva), including the early exchange of information;

(b) Called upon the Swiss authorities and the United Nations Office at Geneva to prepare jointly a defined and coordinated response scenario for all types of incidents;

(c) Proposed a security concept for the Office compound.

32. The first two elements, namely the coordination aspect and the various response scenarios, are being discussed and finalized by the security services concerned and, as such, do not involve major investments in either personnel or equipment. The third element, the security concept, will involve a sizeable one-time investment, mostly for equipment.

33. The security concept is based on the creation of three distinct physical zones, namely:

(a) A reinforced perimeter (some 3.5 km long), that would include enhancement of protection and control at the entrance gates and construction of an entry control building at the route de Pregny gate;

(b) An intermediate buffer zone, with additional security fences and protection for certain areas of the park;

(c) The buildings proper, with reinforced protection against forced entry (protected doors, additional window shutters and electronic access controls).

34. The task force also recommended that a specialized consultancy firm perform a feasibility study, including drawings, specifications and cost estimates for the physical implementation of the concept. The United Nations Office at Geneva is currently in the process of preparing the specifications and terms of reference for the launch of a bidding process to select a consultancy firm. The study is expected to be completed early in 2001.

35. Preliminary discussions have taken place with the Swiss authorities regarding the funding of the security concept. Although nothing has been finalized, it is understood that the costs would be borne by the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Swiss Confederation. The preliminary thinking is that the Swiss Confederation may take responsibility for costs related to outer perimeter and gate entrance control and protection, while the United Nations would assume the costs for the control building at the main entrance at route de Pregny, for reinforced protection of the building and for work related to the buffer zone. While no precise figures are available at the present early stage, it is estimated that the United Nations security costs could be approximately $2.7 million, broken down as follows:

(a) Construction of a security control and visitor reception building at the route de Pregny gate ($1.2 million);

(b) Installation of protected doors, additional window shutters and additional electronic access control ($1 million);

(c) Erection of fencing in various areas of the compound to create an internal security buffer zone ($0.5 million).

36. It should be noted that the above-mentioned amount is some $2 million higher than the amounts spent or allocated in the 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 bienniums. It would be the intention of the Secretary-General to address the requirements for upgrading the security of the United Nations compound at Geneva in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003.

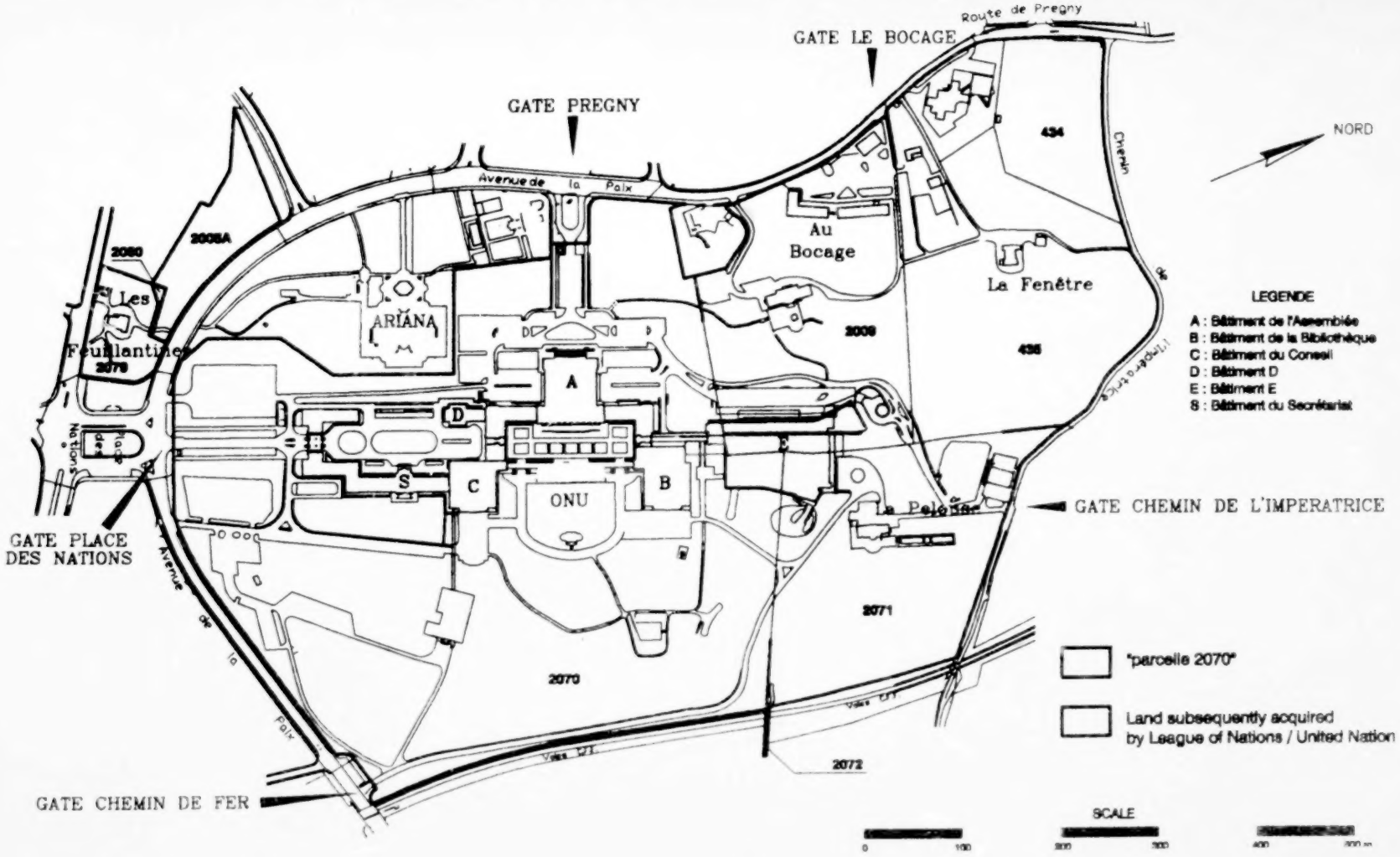
Recommendation

37. The General Assembly may wish to take note of the present report and request the Secretary-General to proceed in the manner proposed.

Annex I

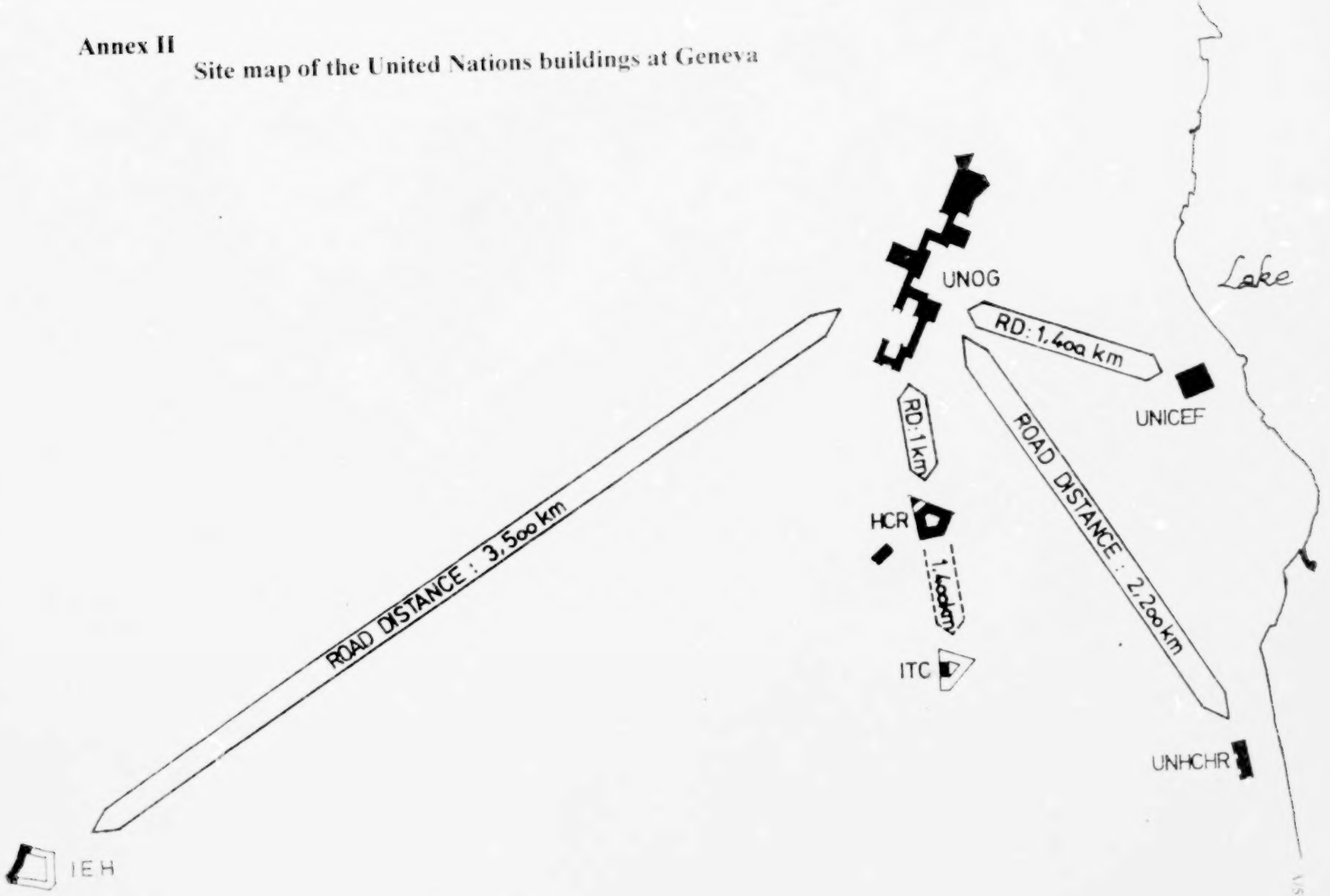
A/55/511

PALAIS DES NATIONS COMPOUND



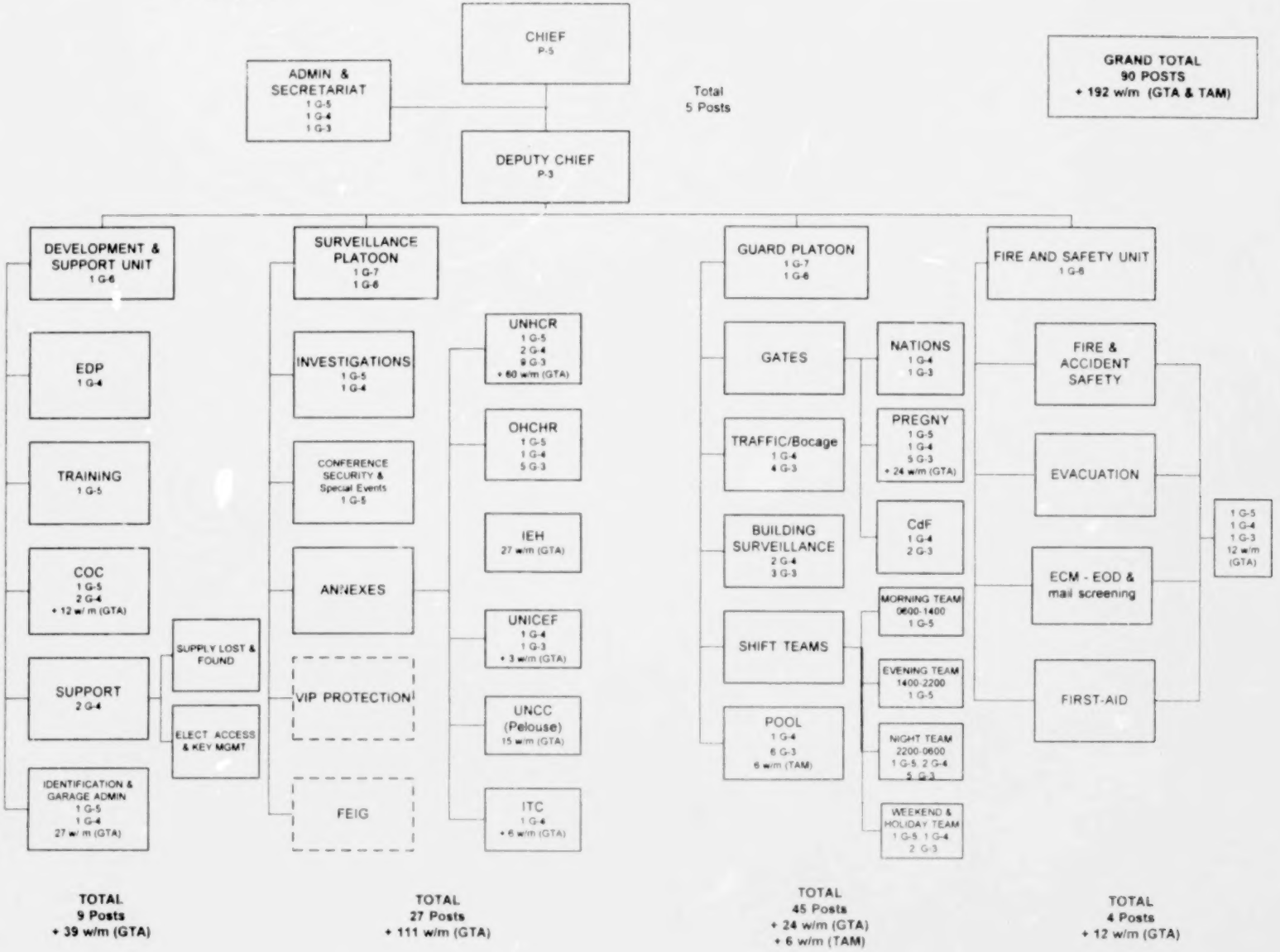
Annex II

Site map of the United Nations buildings at Geneva



Annex III

Security and Safety Section, United Nations Office at Geneva



Annex IV

Security and Safety Section, United Nations Office at Geneva: staffing resources

A- Posts	P5	P3	Total P	G7	G6	G5	G4	G3	G2	Total GS	GRAND TOTAL
1-Regular Budget											
DIVISION ADMINISTRATION	1	1	2	2	4	14	20	27	0	67	69
GARAGE ADMINISTRATION							1	1		2	2
2-Extra-Budgetary resources							1	18		19	19
GRAND TOTAL POSTS	1	1	2	2	4	14	22	46	0	88	90

B-TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE (per Annum)	
1-Regular Budget	
GTA	96 WORK-MONTHS
TAM	6 WORK-MONTHS
2-Extra-Budgetary resources	
GTA	90 WORK-MONTHS
GRAND TOTAL TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE	192 WORK-MONTHS. Equivalent to 16 Positions

GTA =GENERAL TEMPORARY ASSITANCE
TAM = TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR MEETINGS